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THE PARK

Matthiessen State Park is located in central La Salle County, approximately three miles south of Utica and three miles east of Oglesby. The Park received its name from the late Frederick William Matthiessen, a prominent industrialist and philanthropist from La Salle. Matthiessen originally purchased the land near the end of the 19th century and developed it as a privately owned Park during the following years. The original 176-acre Park consisted primarily of a long narrow canyon with a small stream that flows into the Vermillion River. At that time these formations were also called Dells, a name that has stayed with the Park up to the present time. Some years after Matthiessen's death in 1918 his heirs donated the land to the Department of Conservation to open as a public Park. Since that time the Park has grown to 1,938 acres. It now includes more of the significant natural areas along the main Dell, as well as some former prairie and forest land to the south of the original Park. An additional undeveloped parcel of land to the north of the present Park was purchased from the Matthiessen heirs and has been incorporated into the Starved Rock Nature Preserve.

CULTURAL HISTORY— THE EARLY INDIANS

There is archaeological evidence indicating that pre-historic Indians inhabited this area from 8000 BC until 900 BC. From 900 BC on, the area was successively inhabited by Indians of the Hopewellian, Woodland, and Mississippian Cultures. The best known and possibly the largest group of Indians to live in this area during more recent times were the Illinois Indians. It is believed that the Illinois lived in this general area from approximately 1500 AD up to the 1700's, although written historical records for this area date from only 1673 AD and have frequent gaps until the early 1800's. This tribe, numbering 5,000-10,000 was divided into sub-tribes including Kaskaskias, Peorias, Cahokias, Potawatomi, and Tamaroas. The Kaskaskia lived in a large village on the north side of the Illinois River near the present town of Utica. Other Indians found in this general area included the Sac, the Ottawa, the Iorquois, and the Kickapoo. Their migrations were generally the result of upheavals and warfare caused by the Iroquois Indians, the most fierce and warlike of all tribes east of the Mississippi.

FRENCH INFLUENCE

In August, 1673 five French "Voyageurs" led by the explorer Louis Jolliet, and accompanied by Father Jacques Marquette, became the first known Europeans to enter this area. They canoed up the Illinois River from the Mississippi River and stopped at the Kaskaskia Village. They were returning from a voyage of discovery that originally took them across the Great Lakes, through the state of Wisconsin, and down the Mississippi River as far south as the present state of Arkansas. Two years after this visit Father Marquette returned and founded the Mission of Immaculate Conception. Shortly after this, Father Marquette, in ill health, left the area to return to Canada. He died along the way, in the present state of Wisconsin, unable to reach the Jesuit headquarters in Canada. A stone memorial to Father Marquette, dedicated in 1951, has been erected in the present town of Utica near St. Mary's Catholic Church to commemorate the first mission in Illinois.

At about the same time, Jolliet reported his discoveries to the Governor of Quebec and the French slowly began to consider plans for colonization of the area. Several years later, during the winter of 1682-83 Rene Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle built Fort St. Louis on top of Starved Rock. It was La Salle's goal to control the waterways of what is now the central United States; thus allowing French development of the area by preventing the English colonists from expansion to the west of the Allegheny Mountains and holding the Spanish colonists to the south along the Gulf of Mexico. Illinois Indians settled in large numbers near this fort to gain protection from the feared Iroquois tribe and to be near a source of French trading goods. However, increased pressure from the Iroquois caused the Illinois tribes to move south to Peoria. The French traders followed the Illinois to Peoria and this area was largely abandoned by the white colonists. Fort St. Louis was abandoned, and eventually destroyed by fire around 1720.

The stockade fort immediately west of the Dells area parking lot is an approximate recreation commemorating the types of forts built by the French in the midwest during the late 1600's and early 1700's. The French ceded this territory to the British by the Treaty of Paris in 1763. During the American Revolution the area was again under the control of the French, then the state of Virginia, becoming a part of the Northwest Territory in 1787. In 1800 it was included in the Territory of Indiana and in 1809 was recognized as the Territory of Illinois, finally becoming a state in 1818.

RECENT HISTORY

Mr. Matthiessen employed approximately 50 people to construct the trails, bridges, stairways, and check dams at Matthiessen State Park. During the period of his ownership the area was referred to as "Deer Park", a direct reference to the large deer population of past times. The State of Illinois renamed the Park in honor of Mr. Matthiessen during its formal dedication and opening on May 1, 1943.

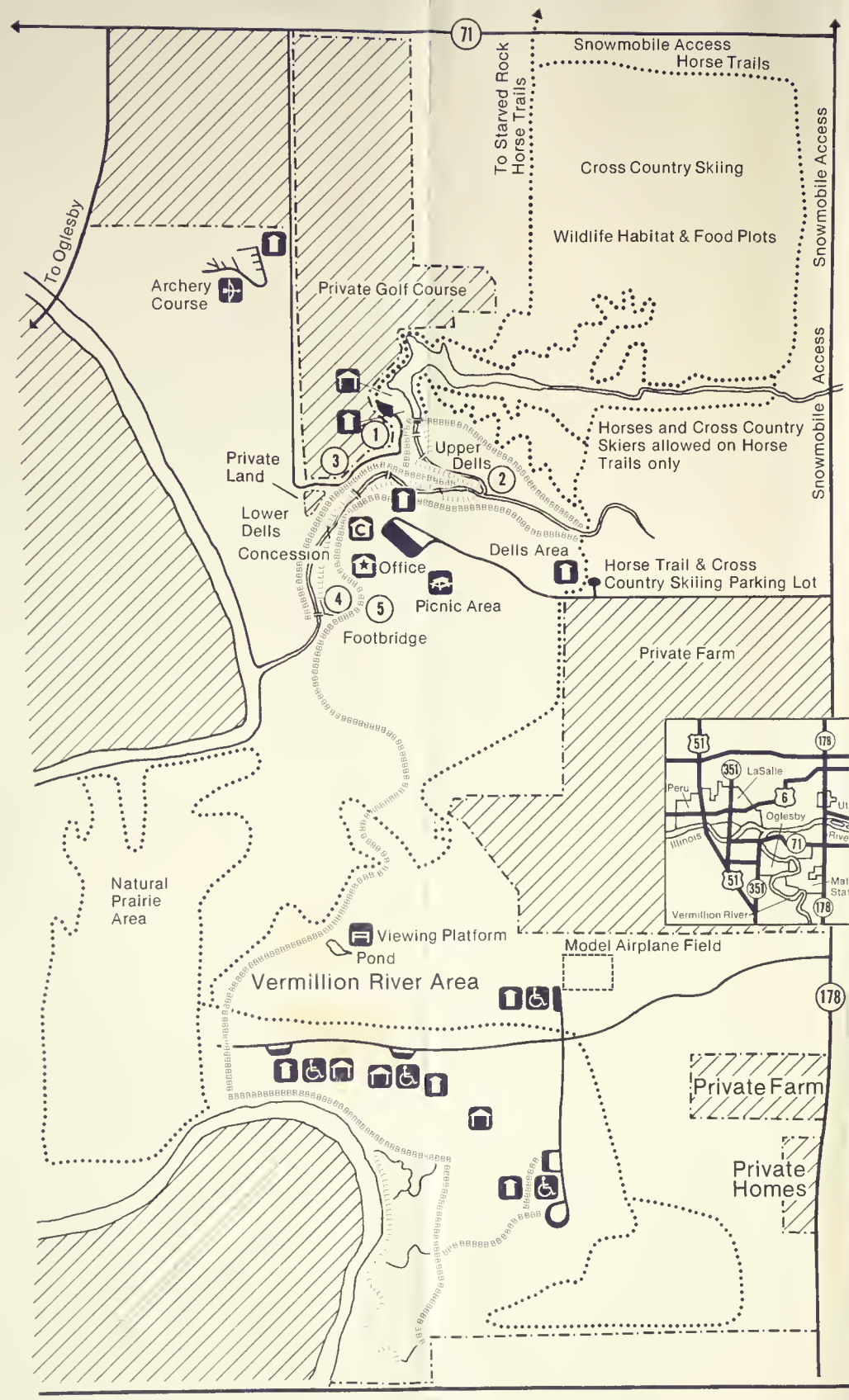
NATURAL FEATURES

Geology

Matthiessen State Park is considered a paradise for people interested in geology. The Park's formative geological history is similar to Starved Rock State Park's, in that the sedimentary rocks were formed by the consolidation of sediment laid down in a huge shallow inland sea 425,000,000 years ago. The sediment was brought to the surface as a result of a huge upfold known as the La Salle Anticline. The most common rock exposed at the surface at this time is St. Peter's sandstone.

While this entire portion of Illinois was glaciated, the canyon was formed by water erosion. The main canyon consists of two levels; the Upper Dell and the Lower Dell. The Upper Dell begins at Deer Park lake and continues to Cascade Falls, where the canyon drops an additional 45 feet in depth and the Lower Dell begins. In general, this canyon was eroded by stream action along the fault lines and joints within the sedimentary rock. The canyon corridor varied in depth from 50 to 150 feet, and is approximately one mile in length from Deer Park lake to the Vermillion River.

The St. Peter's sandstone carried large amounts of water and is an important aquafier for this entire area. At Matthiessen State Park you may observe this ground water seeping out along the canyon walls. This seepage, along with the fact that the canyon floor is generally exposed to direct sunlight for only brief periods of the day, causes the canyons to be continually cool and



Natural Features

1. Giants Bath Tub
2. Sandy Point
3. Cascade Falls
4. Devils Paint Box
5. Strawberry Rock

Legend:

- Roads and parking
- Private land
- Toilets
- Shelters
- Connecting trails, bridges, & steps
- Cross country skiing & horseback trails
- Bluff or upper areas trails
- Interior or lower area trails
- Barrier free handicapped areas

REGULATIONS

NO CAMPING, RAPPELLING, OR ROCK OR ICE CLIMBING ALLOWED. These activities are hazardous and contribute to the destruction of the canyons.

HIKE only the marked trails, unmarked areas are dangerous. Numerous people have been seriously injured or killed in this park.

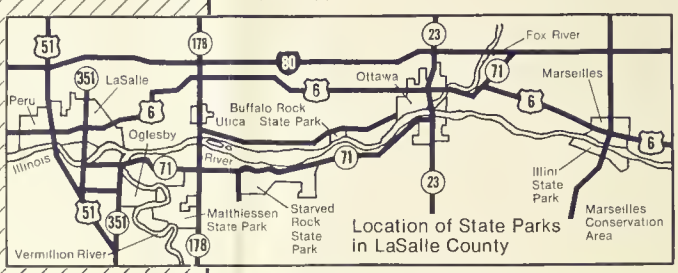
Be off trails by dark.

ALL PETS must be on a leash.

It is a state offense to pick, remove or destroy the plants and animals of any State Park.

IN CASE OF AN ACCIDENT notify the Park Business Office 667-4868 or Starved Rock Park Office 667-4726.

After 4 p.m. notify the STATE POLICE 224-1150.



THE MATTHIESSEN STATE PARK TRAIL SYSTEM IS DESIGNED TO:

I. PRESERVE AND PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT. Sandstones and limestones are not strong rocks; they erode and break easily. All erosion and damage caused by man destroys the beauty of the Park and interferes with the ecological balance and the normal changes caused by natural forces. The trails take you to places best able to withstand man's presence.

II. MAKE YOUR VISIT AS SAFE AS POSSIBLE. Due to the nature of the land and river, you must still exercise caution, particularly on heights or near water.

III. LEAD YOU TO THE MOST SCENIC AND NOTE-WORTHY AREAS of the Park, with the above limitations in mind.

TO FIND YOUR WAY:

Check the map to see where you are, and decide where you want to go.

This map is located at all major trail intersections, with your exact location marked.

There are additional directional signs along the trails to assist you.

damp. As the ground water evaporates along the canyon walls the minerals that are carried in solution in the water contribute to the colors of the rocks.

The Park also has several mineral springs which were possibly a contributing factor to the high deer population within the Park. The mineral springs were visited by the deer much as a salt lick would be visited today.

PLANTS AND ANIMALS

Matthiessen has an extensive range of plant and animal life. In general it preserves those species of flora and fauna that once were common throughout central Illinois, as well as preserving some uncommon species.

There are mosses and liverworts on damp canyon walls and in the shaded recessed of the canyon. Ferns grow luxuriantly wherever there is rich soil and adequate amounts of moisture. The upside down growing American Yew, normally found only to the north, is located in the cool canyon interiors. Other vegetation in the canyon interior is limited to the simpler or lower orders of plant life because most plants cannot become rooted on the steep rock walls. Cliff Swallows and Rock Doves may be seen perching on the canyon walls while frogs, toads, and salamanders seek out the cool, moist canyon floors.

Along the dry sandy bluff tops near the canyon edge Black Oak, Red Cedar, and White Oak grow. White Pines and White Cedar are also found in this area; being brought this far south by the glaciers. Shrubs that are common to this area on the bluff tops include Serviceberry and Northern Honeysuckle. Scarlet Tanagers and Cedar Waxwings are birds that feed on their berries. Yellow-Bellied Sapsuckers drill parallel rows of small holes in Cedar Trees and then feed on the sap and small insects. In the spring of the year you will see the magenta colored blossoms of Shooting Star and also orange Columbine. By summertime the yellow Partridge Pea, the violet colored spiked Leadplants, and purple, square stemmed Mint plants appear.

Further back from the bluffs, where the soil becomes deeper and richer, the Bur Oaks and Hickories are the most common trees. Typical understory plants or shrubs found in association with these trees include Dwarf Blueberry, American Hazel, Black Huckleberry, and the Bracken Fern. Nuthatches and Chickadees are the birds that most commonly feed on the nuts, seeds, and insects associated with these trees and shrubs. In this area Jack-in-the-Pulpits, the many-petaled pastel colored Hepatica, and the delicate pink Spring Beauties blossom in the shaded forest soil during spring. In the areas where the sun breaks through the tree canopy Brown-Eyed Susans and pink spiked Tick-Trefoils will bloom through the summer months. Raccoons and flying squirrels spend hours searching for and gathering berries and nuts in this portion of the forest.

Along the forest edges bright blue Indigo Buntings fly among the Wild Crab Apple and Plum trees that skirt the edge of the forest as it joins the former glacial-till prairie. Cottontail rabbits scamper through the Bluestem and Indian grasses. White tailed deer still come to munch on the Sumac shrubs while Red Tailed Hawks soar overhead searching for field mice. Three-leaved Poison Ivy plants are found in all areas of the Park growing both as a vine and as an individual woody plant; its white berries, a prime source of food for birds. The abundant numbers of these plants are another good reason for staying on the marked trails. If you believe you have come in contact with poison ivy, as soon as possible after exposure wash that portion of the skin with soap and water, then sponge the area with rubbing alcohol and apply calamine lotion. Additionally, you must wash your clothes as the poison can be carried on them for long periods of time.

FACILITIES

The oldest portion of Matthiessen State Park, known as the Dells Area, has the small fort and stockade, a concession stand and shelter building, and the Park office. This area also has toilet buildings as well as picnic facilities consisting of a parking lot, picnic tables, picnic grills, water fountains, and playground equipment. The main trail to the Cascade Falls area originates at the Dells area.

To the south at the Vermillion River Area there are additional picnic shelters, picnic tables and drinking fountains, and trailhead parking lots. There is also a radio controlled model airplane field at the Vermillion River Area.

A parking lot with hitching post and toilet facilities is located on the north side of the Dells area entrance road. This parking lot provides access to 25 miles of horseback riding trails. An information sign at the parking lot gives all the information on length and location of the trails. These trails are used for cross country skiing and snowshoeing whenever there is an adequate snow cover on the ground.

A field archery range with a sight-in area and eight separate targets is located in the northwestern portion of Matthiessen State Park near the Deer Park Golf Course Club House.

Matthiessen has seven miles of well-marked, well-surfaced hiking trails. There are large trail maps located at all major trail intersections, and at each trail head. These may be used with or without a Park brochure. Each has a "YOU ARE HERE" locater marker. Hikers must stay on marked trails as there are dangerous areas due to steep cliffs and the depth of the canyon. The upper area and bluff tops are generally dry and easily hiked. The trails into the interiors of the two Dells can be difficult to negotiate, particularly as the canyon floods during the spring and early summer. Consequently, trail development here is limited. Flood waters frequently wash away the hiking surface or cover it with deposits of mud and forest debris which must be cleared off to once again provide access into the Dells. Trail hiking information is provided on the other side of this brochure on the trails map.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Groups of 25 or more persons will not be admitted to any state site unless permission from the site superintendent has been obtained to use the facilities. In addition, groups of minors must have adequate supervision and at least one responsible adult must accompany each group of 15 minors. All pets must be on a leash.

Numerous state sites are within easy access of every part of Illinois. Lodges, cabins and dining rooms are important features of Illinois Beach, Starved Rock, Pere Marquette and Giant City; White Pines Forest has cabins and dining rooms only. Reservations for lodging should be made with the lodge managers.

Most state sites are open year around, except on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. When weather conditions necessitate the closing of roads during freezing and thawing periods, access to facilities is by foot only.

For more details on this site, contact the Site Superintendent, Matthiessen State Park, Box #381, Utica, IL 61373, phone (815) 667-4868. For information on other land and historic sites, write the Illinois Department of Conservation, Land and Historic Sites, 524 South Second Street, Springfield, IL 62706.

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Illinois Department of Conservation
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